



# **PALOMAR COLLEGE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**1140 WEST MISSION ROAD SAN MARCOS, CA 92069 • (760) 744-1150 EXT. 2289**

Course Objective: Autism – A Law Enforcement Approach

Instructor: Officer Brian Herritt

## **Lesson Plan**

The information is presented via multimedia and handouts.

The course will include three videos in which all or part of the video will be used.

The course will include lecture, group discussion, and question and answer periods.

The course will focus on autism recognition and response; predictable contacts and 911 dispatches, perpetrator and victim trends; de-escalation tips, restraint, arrest and incarceration options, dilemmas in interrogation and interview settings, interviewing victims whom have autism, early childhood behaviors of persons with autism, resources available to help the officer.

## **Hourly Schedule**

### **Objective #1**

What is Autism? Why do law enforcement officers and first response professionals need to recognize autism?

- A) Define Autism: DSM IV Definition – Plain Text Definition – Photos of persons with Autism
- B) Autism Facts – Statistical information
- C) Increase Officer and Community Safety
- D) Make best use of time and resources
- E) LIABILITY
- F) Improve non verbal and verbal communication skills
- G) Learn special tactics for communication, to manage sensory environment in field situations, and to reduce and manage escalation
- H) Handouts / examples of bad LEO contacts

### **Objective #2**

Discuss detailed definition of autism and characteristics commonly seen in individuals who have autism.  
Discuss and review handouts and videos.

- A) Definition. Repeat
  - A,1) Explain autism as a broad –based spectrum developmental disability that impacts the child or adults communication and socialization skills.
  - A,2) autism occurs in 1-150 persons up from 2.5 in 10,000 births a generation ago. Four times more prevalent in males, cause unknown – no cure.

## **Objective #2 Continued**

### **B) Characteristics**

B,1) May not respond to verbal commands, may be non verbal,, run away from officer, if verbal may repeat questions, may answer yes, no, or why to every question

B,2) May have seizure disorder, high pain threshold, sensory sensitivity to even normal touch, lights, Sounds, aromas, or other items.

B,3) May not recognize danger, may not be able to give feedback

B,4) May display socially inappropriate body language, ie. , stand too close, may display hand flapping, shielding, blinking of eyes, or rocking back and forth

B,5) May not understand officers body language, for instance, command presence, rolling eyes, raised Eyebrows, raised voice, use of jokes

B,6) May Present misleading indicators of guilt, such as, lack of eye contact

B,7) May not be potty trained, not like wearing clothing, play with feces or private parts

## **Objective #3**

Present information to enhance better recognition of a person who has autism and response tips for officers in field situations.

### **A) Review of handouts**

B) Forms of identification such as medical alert jewelry, hand out cards, temporary tattoos, PECS board, picture boards, alternative communication aides, etc.

C) De-escalation techniques including geographical containment, calming body language, talking slowly and clearly

D) Restraint techniques including use of buffers such as blankets; risks of seizures, futile continued struggle, hypotonia (Definition) low muscle tone

E) Discuss lawsuits and possibility involving restraining a person with autism.

F) Arrest and incarceration: document autism in report, notify medical at jail, Person is at risk in general population

G) Young Children: If “Melt Down” let family handle. Stay safe distance and allow child to go through emotions

H) Listen to family! They know what is normal and don’t want to see a loved one hurt.

#### **Objective #4**

Identify public safety risks for people who have autism; predictable contacts and 911 dispatches.

- A) Elopement: Child or Adult who wanders
  - A,1) Person seeks water or visual stimulants
  - A, 2) Person runs into traffic, into homes, or businesses
  - A,3) Goes with/ runs from strangers or runs from first responders (children think it is a game)
  - A,4) Elopement often seen as reason for CPS referral or criminal charges
- B) Medical emergency, fire or natural disaster, person is upset and alone at scene
- C) Retail setting, large crowds
- D) Melt Downs may cause to hit, spit, strike people watching or staring at them
- E) Persons behavior has escalated at home or in school

#### **Objective #5**

Explain the problems that a higher functioning person with autism may have in criminal justice situations.

- A) Offender Trends
  - A,1) Stalking or harassment
  - A, 2) School incidents – bullying, teasing
  - A, 3) Illegal Entry
  - A, 4) Shoplifting
  - A,5) Indecent Exposure
  - A,6) Accomplice or sidekick
- B) Interview and Interrogation
  - B, 1) Person may not understand their rights
  - B,2) Blunts answers may seem evasive and unconnected to matter at hand
  - B,3) Eye contact indicates guilt
  - B,4) Increased chance of false confession or misleading statement
  - B,5) Ask question that are not “yes or no” questions,

#### **Objective #6**

Identify issues and consideration when a person with autism is the victim of a crime.

- A) Pre-conceived thoughts of dealing with a victim of crime who has autism
- B) Who are potential offenders
- C) How to conduct interview / tips for interviewer
- D) Crawford V. Washington
- E) Identify role of law enforcement in documenting suspected abuse
- F) Identify sources of evidence

## **Objective #7**

Discuss ways that law enforcement agencies are proactively working with and best ways to get assistance from individuals with autism, their families, and advocacy organizations, and apply tolerance and public relations skills when doing so.

- A) 911 data base
- B) Recognition of the risks of having autism (result of training?)
- C) Roll call briefings
- D) Education partnerships with school
- E) Crisis intervention teams (PERT)
- F) Identify groups that can provide help (in class reps, paperwork)
- G) Include autism in recruit training
- H) Regional Center
- I) Alternate Communication Tools

## **References:**

Autism and Law Enforcement Roll Call briefing video. (2004) Debbaudt Legacy Productions (Video and Booklet)

Autism, Advocates, and Law Enforcement Professionals: Recognizing and Reducing Risk Situations for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Debbaudt, D. London Philadelphia. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Contact With Individuals With Autism: Effective Resolutions. Debbaudt, D. (2001) FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. April, 2001

The Autism Spectrum Disorder Reference Guide. Rady Children's Autism Intervention Center (2008)

Child Abuse Victim with Disabilities. A curriculum for Law Enforcement first Responders and Child Protective Services Frontline Personnel (2007) Nora J. Baladerian PHD.

Victims with Disabilities: The Forensic Interview (2004) Office of Victims of Crime (Video and Booklet)

Serving Crime Victims With Disabilities (2000) Office of Victims of Crime (Video)

### **Collaborator for class material:**

Dennis Debbaudt  
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#### **Experience of Mr. Debbaudt:**

Dennis, the proud father of Brad, a young man who has autism, wrote the ground-breaking booklet *Avoiding Unfortunate Situations* in 1994, the first-ever look at the interactions between children and adults with autism and law enforcement professionals.

He has since written frequently on the topic including the book "Autism, Advocates and Law Enforcement Professionals: Recognizing and Reducing Risk Situations for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders" and articles for the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin and Sheriff Magazine.

He consulted to ABC News 20/20 for the segment, "A Simple Man", about autism and false confession, and was instrumental in the development of the state of Maryland's Police and Correctional Training Commissions 1999 curriculum "Why Law Enforcement Needs to Recognize Autism".

An author, video producer and law enforcement trainer, Dennis turned his attention to providing autism recognition response and risk management training to law enforcement and emergency first responders in 1991.

He presents to law enforcement agencies in the United States, Canada and United Kingdom. His materials are in use by police departments around the world.

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### **Instructor Experience:**

Officer Brian Herritt has worked as a sworn Police Officer for the Palomar College Police Department for the last eight years. Officer Herritt serves as a field training officer and is often asked to provide safety classes for the community in which he works. Officer Herritt is currently working on establishing a San Diego County wide system to track and identify persons with disabilities.

Officer Herritt is the proud father of a six year old who has autism. "Little Brian" was diagnosed with autism in 2004. Officer Herritt has worked to help educate others in the law enforcement community in dealing with persons with autism and other disabilities.

In 2007 Officer Herritt's vision for training was furthered when he received a grant from the San Diego Regional Center. This grant purchased roll call briefing videos on dealing with persons with autism. Those videos will be distributed to selected law enforcement agencies in San Diego County. The video purchased is a part of the curriculum for this class. The creator of that video, Dennis Debbaudt, is also a collaborator for the curriculum.

**References:**

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